

Operations Team Meeting

November 28, 2007

Minutes

The Operations Team convened its meeting at 8:30 AM to review work group project proposals. Present were: Preston Pate, Rob Andrews, Russell Porter, Cindy Thomson, Jason Didden, Ron Sauls, Guillermo Diaz, Jason Schratwieser, Dave Donaldson, Dick Brame, Mike Armstrong, Toni Kerns, Mike Cahall, Mark Fisher, Richard Cody and Josh Demello (by phone).

Preston Pate opened the meeting with instructions that included a statement of FACA restrictions and a reminder that all decisions will be based on team consensus. He stated that consensus approval would confirm project consistency with review criteria provided before the meeting. Subsequent ranking would establish relative importance of the projects.

Rob Andrews gave the team a budget update. Congress has not yet passed the FY08 budget, so it is not clear how much funding will be available for MRIP projects. NMFS ST obligated approximately 400K of FY07 money in anticipation of upcoming projects. This money can be used to procure statistical consultants and contractor support, so it will be possible to get some projects moving forward in the very near term.

Preston next opened the meeting up for general discussion. There were several minutes of discussion about the importance of an effective outreach program and what progress is being made in developing one for the MRIP. Jason Schratwieser mentioned that he's not hearing a lot about the process and that he doesn't think most people know the amount of effort that's being put into it. Dick Brame stressed the importance of identifying easily achieved program improvements and implementing them as soon as possible to show constituents that measurable progress is being made to address the documented and perceived deficiencies of MRFSS. He also recommended that a project be developed that would convene sampling experts to evaluate possible approaches to surveying anglers. He feels that doing so could counter future criticism that our efforts included nothing more than refinements of MRFSS. Russell Porter made a similar point by noting that the project proposals appeared to fill gaps and improve on the MRSS sampling approach instead of defining a new system. Mike Cahall commented that working a survey off a registry frame could be considered a new program. Jason Didden suggested that most of the projects evolved from the OT review of the NRC recommendations. Preston commented that there are limited ways a survey can be conducted and that it will be difficult to depart completely from the fundamentals of MRFSS. Ron Salz commented that the survey design should be flexible and capable of evolving to meet management needs. Mike Cahall noted the absence of an overarching program architecture that clearly describes what our end product is hoped to be.

Projects were reviewed in the order they appeared on the agenda. Written comments submitted by Gary Shepherd before the meeting were considered.

Data Management and Standards Working Group

1. *Identify and consolidate information on existing recreational datasets.*

Comments: All comments were supportive of this project and it was approved as submitted.

2. *Develop marine recreational fisheries minimum data elements and Regional/National standards*

Comments: Project was approved as submitted. Completion of this project is dependent upon completion of project #1.

Design and Analysis Working Group

1. *Improving recreational fisheries discard data*

Comments: This project is necessary for estimating discards by private boat anglers and is very important for stock assessments.

The project should be expanded to apply to other fishing modes.

Collected information should include size and disposition of discards.

The project could be modified to include a volunteer angler survey.

Project was approved with the suggestion that it should be expanded to include private boat and shore fishing modes.

2. *Evaluation of whether estimation procedures appropriately match sample design*

Comments: This is a high priority project that should begin quickly.

This project is a potential example of “low hanging fruit” that can be addressed and subsequently publicized quickly.

Project was approved.

- 3 *Design and analysis methods to account for incomplete angler license frames*

Comments: The team had a lot of discussion about continuation of the RDD program and the need to cover gaps in license-based sampling frames. The methodology currently being pilot tested in the Gulf of Mexico integrates angler

license directory surveys with the existing Coastal Household Telephone Survey in a dual-frame approach to cover nearly all anglers. Barring development of a complete angler registry, dual-frame approaches will be needed to effectively cover angling populations.

Project was approved.

4. *Guide fisheries*

Comments: There was discussion about the significance of the guide fishery in various regions and the relative importance of this project.

The project was approved with the recommendation that funding for pilot studies be deferred pending results of initial data analyses and results of other projects. This will reduce the budget to approximately \$65,000.

5. *Private access fishing*

Comments: There was considerable discussion about the definition of private access. Consensus seemed to be that it should mean fishing from or leaving and returning from private property (i.e. accessing the water from a private residence or private property).

Estimates of landings and effort from private access points are important. One of the primary outcomes of any pilot study should be a comparison of catch rates between public and private access sites.

The project was approved with the recommendation that it be modified to have consultants develop pilot studies to assess logistical issues, sampling procedures and estimation methods.

6. *Night fishing*

Comments: This project was not considered a high priority since the magnitude of night fishing is relatively small.

It was conditionally approved if modified to include the use of consultants to develop pilot studies to identify the best sampling methodology to compare catch rates and validate assumptions.

7. *Tournament fishing*

Comments: The group discussed the relative importance of this project and the potential returns from it's being approved.

The team concluded that the potential benefits do not justify the cost of the project and it was not approved.

For-Hire Working Group

1. *Documentation of For-Hire data collection programs in the United States and U.S. Territories to support an independent review*

Comments: The project was approved as submitted.

2. *Expert review of methods to assess for-hire marine recreational fisheries of the U.S.*

Comments: It was noted that the ACCSP postponed funding a similar proposal since MRIP is looking at the same issue.

The project was approved as submitted.

3. *For-hire census with pilot electronic reporting option for Puerto Rico catch and effort data*

Comments: Project was approved as submitted.

Highly Migratory Species Working Group

1. *Pilot study to characterize recreational private boat highly migratory species fisheries in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico*

Comments: The team recommended amending this proposal to add the HMS charter boat fishery in Texas. Such a change will increase costs by approximately \$5,000.

It was noted that GulfFIN postponed funding a similar project because MRIP is looking at the same issues.

The project was approved.

2. *Highly migratory species for-hire survey – Florida pilot survey*

Comments: There was considerable discussion about whether this project meets the criteria to assess biases in and improve currently methodology, or, if it just expands same.

The project was recognized as being consistent with the work group charge but was assigned a lower priority after consideration of the availability of funds.

3. *Highly migratory species private angler telephone survey – Florida pilot survey*

Comments: This project was approved as submitted.

4. *Evaluation of the sampling distribution of tournament vs. non-tournament trips in the large pelagic survey*

Comments: The project was approved as submitted.

5. *Non tournament HMS landings reporting for private boats in the Caribbean*

Comments: The OT generally supported this project but will ask the work group to redesign and resubmit the proposal with a phased-in approach. The first phase should be an assessment of the fishery and angler reporting preference followed by development of a data collection program.

The next point on the agenda was to assign priorities to the projects. Each team member was asked to give each project a score of 1-10, with 10 being the highest. Scores were totaled for each project, and the projects were ranked accordingly. Scoring was based on each member's assessment of how the projects met the following criteria:

- 1) Is the project consistent with the priorities set by the OT and given to the work groups at the St. Pete workshop?

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- 2) Is the project consistent with the mandates of the MSA reauthorization to improve recreational statistics?

- 3) Significance of the expected project results. Do they have potential benefits that are worth the investment?

- 4) Can the results of the project be expanded to improve national and regional program?

- 5) Practicality. Are scope, design, timeline and budget reasonably matched?

- 6) Will the project address an important management or science need?

The priorities were established as follows:

1. Evaluation of whether estimation procedures appropriately match sample designs
2. Develop marine recreational fisheries minimum data elements and Regional/National standards
3. Improving recreational fisheries discard data
4. Design and analysis methods to account for incomplete angler license frames

5. Private access fishing
6. Documentation of for-hire data collection programs in the United States and the U.S. Territories to support an independent review
7. Identify and consolidate information on existing recreational datasets
8. Expert review of methods used to assess for-hire marine recreational fisheries of the U.S.
9. Pilot study to characterize recreational private boat highly migratory species fisheries in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico
10. Evaluation of the sampling distribution of tournament vs. non-tournament trips in the large pelagic survey
11. Night fishing
12. For-hire census with pilot electronic reporting option for Puerto Rico catch and effort data
13. Highly migratory species private angler telephone survey – Florida pilot survey
14. Guide fisheries
15. Non-tournament HMS landings reporting for private boats in the Caribbean
16. Highly migratory species for-hire survey – Florida pilot survey
17. Tournament fishing

There were a few minutes of general discussion after the project ranking. Mike Cahall recommended that the long term operation of MRIP be overseen by a constituent committee similar to the OT that could advise the service on necessary projects and modifications to the program to respond to changing needs of managers.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30pm.